

PART ONE

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

[p. 17]

- 121 *The object of Part One is (1) to describe the present social structure of the Ovimbundu, and (2) to suggest significant elements that this social structure has or may have for the programme of Christian missions among this people.*

CHAPTER II

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL LIFE

- 127 HAD my historical survey revealed a detailed description of
 122 Umbundu social structure made at some former time, it would also be useful to make comparisons with the present state of affairs. Since there is no such witness out of the past, it is only possible to describe and analyse that which at present exists. For this purpose some excerpts from Umbundu narratives are presented and references made to certain folk-tales and proverbs. The basis of the analysis and description rests more especially, however, upon notes and impressions gathered in field-work over a period of years and upon a considerable number of genealogical tables and schedules of marriage arrangements.¹ These latter are referred to here only to a certain extent. I hope to treat these more fully later. The subject of marriage properly belongs to the field of social structure, but because of its importance I hope to devote a chapter to it. Only certain of the genealogical tables are presented fully and in their several aspects, while the others have served as basis and background for the whole of this part of the study.

- 365 The most significant historical allusion to the social structure
 175 of the Ovimbundu which I have found was an observation of Pinheiro de Lacerda about 1790. "These are they of the Highlands who are made up of two "systems" the one call themselves

- [266] "Quimbundos" (i.e. Ovimbundu), (these do not eat human flesh): the others are called "Quimbangalas" (i.e. the royal households of Imbangala stock), who eat it, and when they make their sacrifice, [782] at which all together attend, then all eat the "Makongo".²

¹ I have 102 of the former and 75 of the latter.

² *Asiatic Museum & Colonialist*, 5a Ser., p. 488.

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(c) *In hunting*, deities other than the king's ancestors were invoked, especially *Hūet*, the hunters' god, and *Kuanja*, a goddess, both of which had their own shrines and priests. These may have been connected with the country or with its earlier inhabitants (the kings being recognized as late comers). At the inaugural hunt the offices were assigned. The king's character was supposedly revealed by the sex of the animal killed at this hunt: 'If the duiker¹ is a female, then it is good indeed, but if a male, then the king is a real person but he habitually will become angry to excess' (*Nda ombambi yaco omange ciwa mulā, puaī nda ulume, Soma omunu puaī o tema tema enene*). 776 224 643 (287)

2. *To represent the nation in its external relations*, i.e. (a) *To make agreements with other kings to promote trade*, and (b) *To make war on other peoples* in order to provide his court with tribute and his warriors with plunder. The war leader (*Kesongo*) had his own residence and establishment entirely separate from that of the king, whom he must not meet face to face except on certain state occasions. In Bailundu he, with certain other officials, was of the stock of the slaves of the state (*ovinduli riosoma*) who came from Luāndu in the Songo country. Each king must inaugurate his reign with a war, during or after which he must ceremonially 'eat the old one' (*oku lia ekongo*)—a feast consisting of the flesh of a specially fattened slave cooked with the flesh of the principal animals commonly eaten. 643 648 701 [721] [266]

3. *To dispense justice*. In point of time consumed, this question was very important, for it occupied much of the time of both rulers and ruled. Good evidence of this is in the number of proverbs used at court, second only in number to those used for the education of the young. The king's court (*olusenje*) was the supreme court of the nation where cases were continually heard and 'fines eaten' (*oku lia ovambu*). Cases might be settled either by ordeal or by decision of the king, and there was therefore room for appeal and re-trial. The king's word, however, was final, as the proverb has it: *O popia oḡanji, o mālāpo osoma*. (The advocate speaks, the king finishes [decides].) The king was not generally arbitrary in his decisions but was bound not only by the customs of his people, but also by the desires of his councillors. Among the legitimate kings of the Ovimbundu there were comparatively few of the revolting and wholesale punishments which were so 643 692 [695]

¹ The duiker, *ombambi* (*Silverycapra grimmii leucoprosopus*).

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Being ready to depart, the great Giga staid us, and desired our boat to pass his men over the river Cova, for he determined to overrun the realm of Benguele, which was on the north side of the river Cova. So we went with him to his camp, which was very orderly, intrenched with piles of wood; we had houses provided for us that night, and many burthens (loads) of palm-wine, cows, goats, and flour. 175^x
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In the morning before day, the general did strike his gongo, which is an instrument of war that soundeth like a bell, and presently made an oration with a loud voice, that all the camp might hear, that he would destroy the Benguelas, with such courageous and vehement speeches as were not to be looked for among the heathen people. And presently they were all in arms, and marched to the river side, where he had provided Gingados.¹ And being ready with our boat and Gingados, the general was fain to beat them back because of the credit who should be first. We carried over eighty men at once, and with our muskets we beat the enemy off, and landed, but many of them were slain. By twelve of the clock all the Gagas were over. [126]

Then the general commanded all his drums, *tavales*, *petes*, *pongos*, and all his instruments of warlike music to strike up, and gave the onset, which was a bloody day for the Benguelas. These Benguelas presently broke, and turned their backs, and a very great number of them were slain, and were taken captives, man, woman and child. The prince, Hombiangymbe, was slain, which was ruler of this country, and more than one hundred of his chief lords, and their heads presented and thrown at the feet of the great Giga. The men, women and children that were brought in captive alive, and the dead corpses that were brought to be eaten, were strange to behold. For these Gagas are the greatest cannibals and man-eaters that be in the world, for they feed chiefly upon man's flesh (notwithstanding of their) having all the cattle of that country. [127]
[266]

They settled themselves in this country and took the spoil of it. We had great trade with these Gagas, five months, and gained greatly by them. . . .

In these five months' space we made three voyages to the city of San Paul, and coming the fourth time we found them not.²

On a subsequent voyage Battell was left by 'the Portugals and Mulattos' as a hostage among the 'Benguelas', whence he escaped to 'the Great Giga', living in his camp and helping to fight his battles during twenty-one months. His description of the life and customs of which he was a daily witness are of great interest, and

¹ 'Gingado', elsewhere spelt 'Iergado', is evidently a misprint for *Jangada*, Portuguese for 'raft'.

² Ravenstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 ff.

175^x the origin of this tribal name. It is no less reasonable to suppose
 167 that the name has also been preserved in the name of a section of
 the Ovimbundu—the *va Ciyaka*,¹ which is an augmentative noun
 from the same verbal stem.

'He saith they are called . . . by themselves Imbangolas.' This
 statement has given rise to a great deal of speculation from the
 time of Purchas to our own. The *Imbangala*, better known as 'the
 people of Jaga Cassange' or Bangalas, are generally recognized to
 have been one of the marauding hordes which troubled Angola in
 the seventeenth century, and it has already been noted that their
 own traditional history, as given by Dias de Carvalho and by
 Ferreira Diniz, fits in with this theory. It seems reasonable,
 therefore, to make this further identification of the 'Jagas' of
 Battell with the Imbangala of Cassange. There is one more
 [173] traditional link to add, and that is that the Ovimbundu of Ciyaka
 recognize the region of Cassange as the location of the oldest
 ancestral tombs of which they have any tradition. Once when there
 was a particularly severe drought, tribal elders were sent from
 Ciyaka to Cassange to worship at these ancient tombs, to anoint
 the skulls, and to plead for rain.

When Purchas noted in 1613 that 'Elembe settled himself in
 Benguele', he meant the hinterland of Benguela Velha,² i.e. in the
 regions of Mbūi (*Amboim*), Cipala (*Quibala*), or Sela (*Cela*). As
 I have shown, tradition connects the kingdom of Wambu with
 Sela, and the kingdom of Bailundu with Cipala. Although
 'Kelandula, sometime his page, proceeds in that beastly life before
 mentioned'. we may be reasonably sure that eventually he also, or
 his followers, settled in the same general region. Both Elembe and
 Kalandula are common Umbundu names and the latter is found
 twice among the kings of Bailundu.

175^x There is further evidence in the similarity of customs as be-
 • 266 tween the 'Jagas' and the royal families of the Ovimbundu, for
 566 both Battell and Cavazzi have given fairly full accounts. To show
 these similarities fully it would be necessary to re-edit Battell, and
 therefore I shall speak of only a few outstanding points. The
 cannibalism of the 'Jagas' was perhaps their most striking custom.

¹ The Portuguese transcription of this form would be 'Giaca', but this has
 become changed to 'Quiaca', as also with many similar names.

² See p. 122, n. 4 *supra*. It was only in 1617 that the settlement on the *Baia
 das Vacas* was made, and (wrongly) given the name of Benguela.

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The Ovimbundu are not ordinary cannibals, if indeed that term may be applied to any people in Africa, nor do the commoners of the Ovimbundu ever eat human flesh on their own account, but no king may ever reign or be considered as regularly enthroned until he has 'eaten Ekongo'.¹ The cannibalism traditionally ascribed to Wambu-Kalunga is also a case in point.² Other human sacrifices practised by the 'Jagas' and described by Battell also have their counterparts in the practices of the Umbundu kingdoms.³ The mode of the burial of the dead described by Battell⁴ is essentially that which has been used, at least until the last few years, for the kings and the other 'holy' men of the Ovimbundu, except that where rock caves are available the use of them has been adopted and in Kasongi cairns were used. The sitting posture and the sacrifice of wives or slaves and cattle (or of substitutes) are the important points, and these have everywhere been used for the classes mentioned, until quite recently.

The custom of keeping boys captured from the enemy and training them to be fearless warriors amid the terrors of the country has a parallel in the Umbundu custom of the king's slaves,⁶ who came from another land⁷ and would therefore do the king's bidding without fear, favour, or consideration of family feeling. They often reached high position and certain of the king's ministers always came from among them. There seem to be many recollections of the 'Jagas' in the customs of the kings' sons.⁸ Names of certain of the officials seem to have survived, as, for example, Mani (*muñlé*) Lumbo, Mani-Currio (*Muñkalia*), Golambolo (*Ngalamboli*), Tendala (*Candala*), Ukuetambo,⁹ &c. Careful linguistic studies would doubtless reveal many remains of the speech

¹ *Oku lia Ekongo*—lit. 'to eat the Old One'. This is a ritual feast in which the flesh of a specially fattened slave is eaten mixed with the flesh of various animals. See Ravenstein, op. cit., p. 33, note 3. Magyar described this custom, calling it 'Ouri-Kongo', op. cit., pp. 275 ff.

² See *supra*, p. 176.

³ Compare Ravenstein, op. cit.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 34 f.

⁵ 'Holy' in the sense of spirit possessed—the king, the hunter, the medical practitioner, and the smith.

⁶ *Ocinduli cosoma*, singular. May there be some recollection of 'Kinguri' (= Cinguli) in this word?

⁷ In Bailundu the *ocinduli viosoma* (plural) came mostly from Luandu, i.e. the Songo country across the Kuanza—further evidence of connexion with Lunda emigrants.

⁸ *Ondila volosoma*, used collectively of all the royal families of the Ovimbundu.

⁹ Cavazzi, op. cit., pp. 206 f., 211.

regent and incarnation" of the spirits. Sacrifices were made at the royal shrine or *kukheto* ("at the skulls"), where the skulls of past chiefs were kept, in order to:-

(i) control the elements i.e. to ensure a sufficient supply of rain and avoid the dangers caused by storms; also to control fire by providing a new fire ceremonially kindled⁽¹⁾ from which everyone took his fire.

(ii) to ensure fertility, towards which the royal marriage had great influence. The queen's special province was agriculture and her kitchen was sanctified by human sacrifice to guarantee the national food supply. Ceremonially treated seed was distributed to be mixed with the seed of each granary.

(b) To represent the country in its external relations, principally to make trade agreements with other chiefs, or to make war on other peoples in order to get tribute and plunder. The war leader (*Kesongo*) has his own residence entirely separate from that of the king, whom he must not meet face to face except on certain ceremonial occasions.⁽²⁾ Each king must inaugurate his reign with a war, during which or after which he must ceremonially "eat the old one" (*oku lia okongo*) - who was usually a specially fattened slave cooked with the flesh of the principal animals commonly eaten.⁽³⁾

(c) To dispense justice. The chief's court or *olusenje* was the supreme court of the chiefdom. The chief had the final word in any case, but most chiefs acted according to custom.

(d) To protect himself and the chiefdom, the chief could use "magic" (?) which might have been accounted witchcraft or murder if practised without authority: e.g. the ritual murder of a pregnant woman, or of the children whose lives were required for building and furnishing the queen's kitchen.

(e) The chief made much use of divination in order to carry out his office. For this purpose he had his own diviner (*ciue cosowa*), who was of the blood royal; but he also consulted diviners of other regions and types.

Succession to chiefship is in the male line,⁽⁴⁾ from father to son, elder brother to younger brother or brother's son, or sometimes to one more distantly related. The election is made by the councillors whose duty it is (?), ordinarily before the old chief's death is announced. These same councillors may depose an unpopular chief, and there have been many such depositions. This "democratic" tendency of the Ovimbundu has been noted by most writers. Childs points out that it is attested by the fact that a chief (formerly as well as today) works in his own fields, and by folk-tales which give incidental and intimate pictures of petty details in the lives of the chiefs.

(1) See above, p. 26.

(2) In Bailundu he, with certain other officials, was of the stock of slaves of the state (*ovindili visowa*).

(3) Childs, p. 21. Many early writers refer to the cannibalism of the "Jagas" or "Imbangalas" who are thought to have been the Ovimbundu chiefs. (See above, p. 8, and also Lacerda and Ravenstein, quoted by Childs, pp. 17ff.)

(4) But inheritance is said to follow a different line among chiefs from among commoners; possibly inheritance is also in the paternal line. See Childs p. 18.

* See footnote L, p. 31

171 wide distribution in Africa (C. Wiedemann, 1909) and the ceremony
175 still survives among the Ovimbundu in modified form.

[114] Though an informative writer, Monteiro is sometimes vague; he says (I, p. 278) that circumcision is a universal custom among the blacks of Angola. In view of the extent of Angola, the diversity of tribes, and the fact that Monteiro traveled over only a small part of the country, this information is misleading.

Monteiro is the only writer in whose works I have found a reference to the Vasele tribe; probably no part of Angola has been so neglected as the Esele country in the hinterland of Novo Redondo. At the present day the Vasele have a reputation for cannibalism.

[266] Monteiro saw human flesh eaten at Cuacra, while the skulls of the victims were placed on adjacent trees. Monteiro states (II, p. 167) that on the death of a king the Mucelis (Vasele) put out all the fires in the kingdom; these were relighted by the succeeding king who used fire produced by rubbing two sticks together. The flat beads [321] of shell called *dongos*, made from *Achatina monetaria* (II, p. 168), are made today and traded to the far south of Angola, where their novelty assures them a value far beyond their intrinsic worth. I was fortunate in obtaining an example of the old beheading ax mentioned by Monteiro (II, p. 157) and sketched by Cavazzi (p. 210). Par-boiled and roasted rats were offered to me as food; Monteiro mentions [262] the offering of a roasted rat on a skewer (I, p. 99).

The account of Commander V. L. Cameron, who left Zanzibar for his journey across Africa in 1873, mentions several points of anthropological importance in relation to the Angolan section of his journey. Cameron saw a net-covered medicine-man of the Kibokue [756] (Vachokue) wearing a mask and a kilt of grass (p. 384). The function of this man was to frighten devils from the woods. The contest in [524] which boys discharge their arrows at a rolling root was seen by Cameron near Kagnombe (Cangamba?). Skulls of victims killed in [797] war were spiked on poles (p. 399). The diviner was followed by attendants who struck iron gongs, while the diviner himself shook a rattle made of basket-work in the form of a dumb-bell (p. 404). Cameron gives an accurate description of the divination basket and its use without going into details. These I have been able to supply [482] (chapter IX). The explorer met caravans of Bihéans, renowned carriers then as they are today. They were usually drunk and abusive; in some instances they attempted to rob the stragglers.

000 The use of caterpillars as food is noted (p. 416): "A man cut open

114 trative posts. I agree that people between Caconda and Huila
101 represent a racial mixture of the Ovimbundu and the Ovambo. The
record speaks of painting-houses for girls at Cabinda, an item which
agrees with reports from other sources. The jottings concerning
tribes from Cabinda to the far south of Angola are too vague to be
used in ethnological work with confidence.

There are many points on which the work of A. Schachtzabel
should be consulted for the purpose of making comparisons with my
[62] own observations. The chief of these are a note and photograph on
[29] village construction (p. 130); the musical bow (p. 32); the loom
[775] (plate VI); transmigration of the soul of a chief into an animal (p. 51);
[524] and the game of inancala (p. 52). My observations of initiation at
[88] Katoko, Ngalangi, and Cangamba agree well with that of Schacht-
zabel at Katoko, but I was able to obtain more detail and more
[282] numerous photographs of the ritual of initiation. The spinning of
cotton (p. 143) is exactly the process so frequently witnessed now at
Elende. Iron-working (p. 111) appears to be comparable with the
technique at Elende, but Schachtzabel seems to have missed the
ritual. I was not so fortunate as this author in finding the old type
of iron-smelting furnace in use.

114 The work of Statham is devoted primarily to hunting and descrip-
136 tions of plant and animal life. The chapter given to a casual descrip-
tion of people among whom he passed is not useful as ethnology;
but the book is of service in providing a background of natural history.
Information on the tsetse fly in Angola (p. 294) assists ethnological
work by showing the determining effect of this biological factor.
[23] Presence of the fly is prohibitive to cattle-keeping, therefore cattle
are not kept along the river courses which are infested with this pest.

114 Alexander Barns made no pretence of writing more than a travel
book; nevertheless he publishes photographs of ethnological value,
gives useful historical summaries, and deals with economic problems
of production and transportation.

114 Tucker's book "Drums in the Darkness," though written to
175 interest the American public in mission work, contains many ethno-
logical statements. The chief of these relate to the structure of the
compound (p. 37); the dress of women (p. 39); naming of twins and
triplets; and other items which agree well with data from the district
in which I worked. There are notes on drum signals (p. 74) and
[202] cannibalism (p. 77). Apparently drum signals were in use at Bihe
half a century ago. Forty years ago a slave was killed and eaten
[266] at the installation ceremonies for a new king, a point that was noted

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was too light to make it effective as a tool or weapon (Plate XIII, Fig. 4). At Bailundu I was informed that an ax of this kind is used in a medicine-man's dance which is intended to cure a man who is sick because a spirit has entered into him. The sickness may have occurred because the man has broken a promise. 755

The medicine-man, or sometimes the patient himself, dances violently, meanwhile cutting about him with the ax (*omutaka*), which is finally used for killing a little pig whose blood is drunk by the sick man. This is the ritual that was previously mentioned in describing divination.

The following are important ceremonial objects: The ax *ekusa* 411 (Plate XIII, Fig. 5) was the one used for killing slaves who were [266] eaten at the death of a king. This object was secured in the Vasele 782 country near Vila Nova de Selles. It is of handsome appearance, having a copper circle inlaid into the iron blade. A spear from Bailundu is likewise important because of its use in ritual (Plate XIII, Fig. 8). Before war and hunting this spear was thrust first into an ox then into a slave. The human and animal flesh were cooked together and eaten from the same pot. The female figure used by the medicine-man for consultation with regard to the correct path for a caravan has been described. A carved wooden post obtained from Bailundu was set up at cross-paths so that it might be visited by a sick person or his representative who would make sacrifice there.

Without parallel among ceremonial objects used by the Ovimbundu 779 is a small wooden cloth-covered box from Bailundu. This contains a piece of root of cylindrical form tightly bound with cloth having at one end a cowrie shell. The box is the shrine of *Kandundu*, for whom a small hut is built in order to contain the box. Any one who sees the contents of the shrine is said to become blind. *Kandundu* is believed to be the "spirit of dreaming who makes swellings come on the body."

Antelope horns are in general use as containers of magical potions. 789 One horn from Bailundu is used for holding sweet beer which is drunk 237 by a person afflicted by bad dreams. A large horn with a piece of fur attached, also from Bailundu, is named *ocindiko*. The horn contains a mixture of fat and charcoal which is heated near camp after sunset, when men are on the march. The spreading fumes keep away lions and thieves. It was said that a thief is deterred because the fumes make him cough.

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of ritual cannibalism (*oku lia ekongo*) after which he could not be deposed.⁶⁴

Hastings in describing the principal ministers of the Bailundo court states that the Mwekalia and the Galamboli or Ngambole (whose function was to remember traditions) were representative of the indigenous pre-Jaga stock, the Kesongo who was the war leader was a slave from another tribe, and the Otjinduli was of immigrant stock, and points out that these represent the three sources from which the Ovimbundu sprang.⁶⁵

At the sub-chiefdom level some of the titles found in the kingdoms would be found combined, and the chief's court, where cases were judged, was composed both of titled ministers living at the chief's village and of the village headmen (some of whom were also title-holders). The sub-chief represented his people to the outer world, led them in communal ritual and judged, with his councillors,⁶⁶ their disputes. Hastings describes a case thus: 'When all the members of the court are seated in a circle, with an empty space in the centre, the plaintiff's counsel then relates the case, after which the lawyer for the defendant does likewise for his side. The chief in turn makes general comments. Lusenje, the official, whose duty it is to keep order at court and to announce the speakers, then calls on the accuser to come forward and make his statement.'⁶⁷

While the sub-chiefdom was the largest unit in which law and order reigned undisputed, there existed alliances and cross-cutting relationships providing a contact outside its area. There was the *tjisoko* alliance which existed between two sub-chiefdoms which were separated by a third. Gumba sub-chiefdom was thus allied to Ndjandju from which it was separated by Chicunda, and messengers from Gumba and Ndjandju travelled together to Bailundo once a year to carry tribute. Apparently a sub-chiefdom had only one *tjisoko* partner. The relationship was one of funeral friendship; *vakwatjisoko* (*tjisoko* partners) undertook the burial of those who died without kinsfolk and also ordinary

⁶⁴ This is based on information from Gumba. See also Magyar, pp. 270-77; Hastings, pp. 43-45; Childs p. 21.

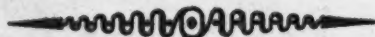
⁶⁵ Hastings, p. 60.

⁶⁶ Informants.

⁶⁷ Hastings, pp. 142-43.

CHAPTER III

CHIEFS AND HEADMEN IN GUMBA



1. *The History of Gumba*

The historical perspective of Ovimbundu is short. Few, even ⁸¹⁴ elders, know of any landmark earlier than the Mutu-ya-Kevela rising of 1902-3, nor even for those who had participated in it did the time of the rubber trade form a Golden Age by which the present is judged. The period about which most was remembered was the reign of Mbatí.¹

Mbatí had ruled over both Gumba and Chicunda, a union ¹⁷³ which had existed only during his lifetime, and which would ⁶³⁴ have given him on present-day population figures 7,500-9,000 ²⁶¹ subjects.² He had managed to keep in his own hands the relations between his people and the government post. Policemen arriving at his capital to recruit labourers were entertained while Mbatí's ministers got together the men required. Although an upholder of the traditional rites associated with chieftancy he had been on good terms with the missionaries and ¹²⁷ allowed a Catholic catechist to settle in his village. One of his sons became a Protestant schoolteacher near the railway line, another entered the Catholic seminary but left and became a policeman in Cela. Many of the numerous progeny provided by his seventeen wives are still living in Gumba.

Mbatí's downfall came through his practising the traditional ²⁶⁶ annual ritual cannibalism (*oku lia ekongo*). About 1934-5 he ²⁴⁸ was banished for this to another part of Umbundu country.

[text continues on p. 37]

¹ L. Magyar marks a place called Gumba on his map (opposite to page 1) but puts it to the south of the capital of Bailundo. As he does not seem to have personal knowledge of this area, this does not rule out identification, especially as the Cuvo begins to the south of Bailundo.

² For the basis of this estimate see section 2 of this chapter.